

A Pennsylvania forest  
the second time around

# REBIRTH OF A WILDERNESS

MAURICE J. FORRESTER, JR.

**SAVE STONY VALLEY**

P.O. Box 587 F.S.S. - Harrisburg, PA. 17108

**N**O ONE CAN SAY with certainty how St. Anthony's Wilderness got its name. One version has it that in 1742 Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a Moravian missionary, climbed to the crest of the Blue Mountain in southeastern Pennsylvania and, after contemplating the primeval splendor to the north, named the valley "Anthony's Wilderness," in honor of Anthony Seyfert, a friend and fellow missionary. If this is the true version, then the Moravian Seyfert was speedily canonized, since the name, "St. Anthony's Wilderness," appears on a map believed to have been printed shortly after the Revolutionary War.

However it came about, the name stuck and is generally applied today to a system of long, narrow ridges and valleys running east and west through Dauphin and Lebanon counties. Although the area's boundaries are rather fuzzily defined, it is generally thought to lie between state route 325 to the north, Second Mountain to the south, Gold Mine Road to the east, and Ellendale Forge to the west.

Along with a number of lesser-known trails, both the Appalachian and Horse-Shoe trails pass through the region, providing access to hunters and fishermen in season, and hikers year-round. Motor vehicles, however, are barred by state game commission regulation, making this the largest roadless tract in Pennsylvania's populous southeastern quadrant. Located only about a dozen miles from the state capitol in Harrisburg, and a hundred miles from the Philadelphia metropolitan center, St. Anthony's Wilderness is a jewel of tranquility lying within two hours' travel of half the state's population.

At the crest of Stony Mountain, near the center of St. Anthony's Wilderness, stands a massive stone tower rising some 30 feet high and measuring perhaps ten feet square at its base. The original purpose of the tower is not known and has been subject to much idle speculation in recent years. It is, however, a magnificent example of the stonemason's art, evoking unvarying admiration in the occasional hikers who pass that way. But slowly and relentlessly the passing seasons are taking their toll. Each year sees one or two more stones dislodged from their places and fallen to the ground. Inevitably, the day will come when the tower is nothing more than a jumbled pile of stones on top of the mountain. And when the last stone falls from the mysterious tower, will it be the final act of St. Anthony's Wilderness reclaiming its own? Or will it signal instead the awful evolution of one century's naive industry into the next century's sophisticated madness?

"In exploiting such lands a second time, we shall not merely be imitating the example of our ancestors; for what they undertook in blithe disregard, we shall be pursuing in cynical indifference, and our intentions will be armed with a capacity for destruction they scarcely could have imagined."

*Maurice J. Forrester is a member of the  
Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club.*

The story of St. Anthony's Wilderness is one we find repeated throughout the eastern states. Lands explored, cleared, and settled relatively early in the history of this country were exploited and later often abandoned if they ceased to provide a living. Left alone, nature began to reclaim the land; time began to heal its scars. Whether this healing process will continue now depends not so much on what our forefathers did in their time as what we will refuse to do in ours. For today, when areas such as St. Anthony's Wilderness are at last beginning to return to something like their primitive condition, they have caught the attention of men who would repeat the destruction of the past. For example, two hydroelectric dams are proposed for Stony Creek in the heart of St. Anthony's Wilderness. Unlike the tower on Stony Mountain, they will not crumble in a century or two. Given the efficiency of our methods and the permanence of our monuments, a second recovery of the land would require ages, if it happened at all. In exploiting such lands a second time, we will not merely be imitating the example of our ancestors: for what they undertook in blithe disregard, we will be pursuing in cynical indifference, and our intentions will be armed with a capacity for destruction they scarcely could have imagined.

**T**HE REGION was first opened to settlers in the 1750's. Gradually, a few families drifted into the area to try their hands at farming the rocky soil. There was probably also some rudimentary lumbering on a very small scale. It is known that two small villages came into existence—Rausch Gap and Yellow Springs—both of which were stops on the stage line that later gave the region regular contact with the outside world. All in all, however, the wild, unspoiled character of St. Anthony's Wilderness was probably little changed until the middle of the 19th century, when the discovery of coal triggered a boom that swelled the valley's population from a few families to at least 3,000, and possibly as many as 5,000, inhabitants by the waning years of the century. A third village, Gold Mine, appeared during the coal-mining boom, taking its name from a mine that was opened to exploit a vein of coal of such high quality that the owners

considered it to be as good as gold. But like all the other veins in this area, the Gold Mine vein was shallow and soon exhausted.

To serve the coal-mining industry, the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Railroad brought its track into St. Anthony's Wilderness, with one main line running the entire length of the valley and several spur lines branching off to the various coal-mining operations. The advent of the railroad made it easy for visitors to get to the

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### When the last stone falls, will it be the final act of St. Anthony's Wilderness reclaiming its own?

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region, and around 1880, a resort hotel was built to exploit the mineral springs that had been discovered. Those who could afford the luxury came from as far away as Philadelphia and even beyond to renew their ailing bodies in the healing mineral baths offered by the Cold Spring Hotel.

As coal mining tapered off, lumbering became the principal money-making activity of the region. The same railroad lines that once served the coal-mining industry were now turned to hauling lumber. When the forest to the south of Stony Mountain was all cut off, lumbermen shifted their activity to the north side of the mountain and even down into Clark's Valley. Lumber cut there was hauled to the top of the mountain on an incline, then dropped down another incline on the south side to the main line of the S & S Railroad, which then carried it away to market.

By 1900, it was all over. The shallow veins of coal were long since played out; the mineral springs no longer tempted the ailing rich of the big cities; the mountain sides were stripped bare of trees. All the lures that had brought people into the valley were gone. Then, the people themselves left; the railroad stopped running; and quiet descended once again on the despoiled wilderness. A population that once numbered several thousand dropped in the early years of the century to virtually zero.

For several decades thereafter nothing happened. Between them, the railroads and the coal companies owned the land. But since it offered

them no profit, they did nothing with it. If a buyer could have been found, probably they would have sold out; but no one else wanted it either. So the land was left alone, and the healing process began, with no one to watch but an occasional hunter or fisherman, or an even more occasional hiker.

Finally, in the 1940's the land was purchased by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, an action which, until now, has served to preclude any further development of the area. State Game Lands Number 211 (the official designation for this area) is a tract of over 36,000 acres, about 18 miles long and 3 miles wide on the average. Today, it is a beautiful second-generation wilderness, traversed by typical Appalachian ridges reaching an elevation of about 1,500 feet, teeming with wildlife, and laced with icy streams—streams whose names sing a song and tell a story: Stony Creek, Rattling Run, Devil's Race Course, Rausch Creek, Gold Mine Run. The signs of man's former habitation are readily apparent: old mine workings, railroad beds, scattered foundations of former buildings, even a small cemetery with a few stones that bear inscriptions from the 1850's. But all these souvenirs of past human activity have been so softened and mellowed by the passing years that they scarcely add a discordant note to the surrounding wilderness, enhancing it, rather, with a certain aura of wistful mystery. And in time, these monuments, like the stone tower, will crumble into memory.

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stayed in Boston or Philadelphia—or never left England at all—but we can regret the avidity with which they embraced the new land, the thoroughness with which they used it. At the same time, we can also be thankful that in many places, such as St. Anthony's Wilderness, these men, having wrung from the land what they

could, then abandoned it for time to care for, leaving behind them only such relics as the tower on Stony Mountain. Those of us who wish to prevent a second violation of the eastern wilderness take a charitable view of such mementos, preferring to overlook them rather than overlook the land itself. For we now have an opportunity in many areas to assure that the healing power of time is

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allowed to complete its work. But if those who would repeat the actions of our forefathers are permitted to pursue their narrow vision, places like St. Anthony's Wilderness will probably be lost for good.

**W**ITH THE AID of today's advanced technology, another scheme has again been devised for wrenching dollars from the wilderness. Pennsylvania Power and Light Company (PP&L) and Metropolitan Edison Company have jointly proposed to dam Stony Creek in order to build a hydroelectric pumped-storage facility in the heart of St. Anthony's Wilderness. If this proposal is implemented, about one-third of the valley floor would be flooded not only to generate electricity, but to store it, and to do this in a way that all parties

concede is flagrantly inefficient.

Two reservoirs would be constructed, one behind the dam to be built across Stony Creek, and the other higher up Stony Mountain. During periods of slack demand, power would be taken from the lines of the utilities and used to pump water from the lower reservoir into the upper reservoir. Later, when a peak-demand period strained the generating capacity of the two companies, the stored water in the upper reservoir would be released to rush back down to the lower, in the process turning a generator and producing electricity. Unfortunately, for every three units of power used to raise the water in the first place, only two are recovered when the water returns. The remaining third is lost.

In order to acquire the land necessary for the construction of this facility, the utilities have entered into an agreement with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to trade 5,400 acres now owned by PP&L in a valley to the north for 1,700 acres in the middle of the wilderness. Not only would the heart be cut out of this pristine valley, but the wilderness value of the surrounding acreage retained by the game commission would be diluted by the presence of access roads and transmission lines. Stony Creek itself would, of course, be destroyed. In defense of this unconscionable abdication of its public trust, the game commission smugly points to the added acreage it is acquiring, and ignores the destructive surgery that would be performed upon a natural treasure.

Rallying slowly at first, but with increasing vigor during the past year, opposition has been mounted to battle the proposed destruction of St. Anthony's Wilderness. The Stony Creek Valley Coalition has been formed and counts among its members the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, Trout Unlimited, the League of Women Voters, and a host of local organizations. The coalition contends that the decision to build this pumped-storage facility, originally made in the 1960's, is no longer valid or socially acceptable. They argue further that by the mid-1980's, when the project is scheduled to be completed, rapidly advancing technology in this area will have made pumped storage obsolete as a means of storing electricity.

On a more basic level, the coalition questions the real need for an additional storage facility, noting that effective conservation measures coupled with a change in the present rate structure to eliminate waste by large industrial and commercial users would make the construction of an additional facility of this type unnecessary. Finally, it is argued that if the utilities can prove the absolute need for a pumped-storage facility, then such a project could be built in a strip-mined or quarried area where the environment has already been so debased that the likelihood of further damage is academic. The battle is on. What the outcome will be no one knows. All that is certain is that the many people who love this region will not permit it to be ravished a second time without putting up a bitter fight.